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A mother embraces her son who escaped the besieged city of Mariupol and arrived in Lviv on Sunday | AP

RUSSIA BOMBED ART SCHOOL SHELTERING 400, SAYS UKRAINE

The school in Mariupol was completely destroyed and efforts were on to rescue hundreds trapped beneath the rubble. The bombing comes as Russian and Ukrainian forces engaged in heavy street battles for control of Mariupol on Sunday. Meanwhile, Ukraine said many of Mariupol's residents were forcibly taken to Russia. Moscow admitted to taking people, but said they were refugees | P9

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Sri Basavaraj S. Bommai
Hon'ble Chief Minister

3 HC judges to get 'Y' category security, says CM

Justices face death threat after hijab verdict; Police in Madurai to get custody of accused

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

FOLLOWING a death threat issued to three judges, including Chief Justice of Karnataka High Court Ritu Raj Awasthi, who headed the three-judge bench that delivered the verdict on the hijab row on March 15, Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Sunday upgraded the security for all the three judges to 'Y' category. Justices Krishna S Dixit and JM Khazi are the other two judges.

Meanwhile, a Bengaluru police team reached Madurai in Tamil Nadu to take custody of one of the accused arrested by Madurai police, Covai R Rahmatullah. A resident of Coimbatore, he is said to be an office-bearer of an Islamist organisation, Tamil Nadu Thowheed Jamaath (TNTJ). He had allegedly made a speech at an event, holding out an open threat that if the judges get killed over the hijab verdict, they themselves would be responsible for it. He had then reportedly referred to a district judge in Jharkhand being knocked down by a vehicle.

The three-judge bench of the Karnataka High Court had ruled on March 15 that wearing of hijab/headscarf by Muslim women does not form part of an essential religious practice in Islamic faith protected under Article 25 (freedom of conscience) of the Constitution, while upholding the ban imposed by the state government in educational institutions.

Apart from arresting Rahmatullah, the Madurai police have also booked two other members of the same outfit, but their names have not been disclosed.

Police sources said a team of Vidhana Soudha police — with whom a complaint was filed by an advocate after the video clip went viral — is in Madurai to take custody of the accused persons by producing body warrants.

An officer privy to the developments told *The New Indian Express* that if they get the custody early, the accused will be brought to Bengaluru. Otherwise, the police team will interrogate them in Madurai, record their statements and initiate further action.

CONTINUED ON: P4

Cong polls rigged to elect a Gandhi, say rebels

Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad at a party event in Jammu on Sunday

SHAHID FARIDI @ New Delhi

CONGRESS rebels have claimed that the organisational election process set in motion by the party leadership is rigged to elect a member of the Gandhi family or their nominee as party president.

The Congress Working Committee (CWC) members elected through this process would also be an exclusive club of family loyalists, they said.

The party leadership had recently constituted a Central Election Committee (CEC) and nominated former MP Madhusudan Mistry as its chairman. Mistry is assisted by four other members — Rajesh Mishra (former MP), S Jothimani (Lok Sabha MP), Arvinder Singh Lovely (former Delhi minister) and Krishna Byre Gowda (Karnataka MLA).

This CEC would hold organisational elections which would conclude in August-September this year with the election of a new Congress president and members of the CWC.

CONTINUED ON: P7

Biren stays, brass briefs PM on Goa, Uttarakhand

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

SHORTLY after the BJP announced N Biren Singh will continue as chief minister of Manipur, its top brass called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on Sunday to brief him on the leadership choices in Goa and Uttarakhand and the composition of ministries in all the four states it retained in the recent polls.

Union ministers Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh along with BJP national president J P Nadda and general secretary (organisation) B L Santhosh were part of the deliberations with the PM.

"Our leaders gave a detailed briefing on government formation to the PM, who wants the composition to reflect what India should be in the next 25 years. For all the four states, the chief ministerial faces have been decided and shared with the PM," a senior party source said.

"There seems to be no changes in the leadership for Goa and Uttarakhand, but it will be made official later," said another senior leader. Though the party won Uttarakhand by a handsome margin, its Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami lost his seat, which made other aspirants vie for the post. As for Goa, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant led the fight to help the BJP retain the state.

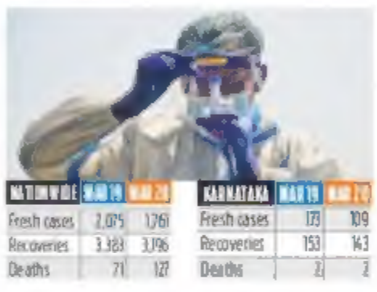
The official announcement on the Uttarakhand and Goa chief ministers will be made on Monday. The participation of women in the ministries is expected to be good. "Women and young voters solidly supported the BJP, so it is but natural to give them good representation in the ministries in all the four states," a party leader said. P7

Cut dosage gap to 8-16 weeks: Expert group

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

THE National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) on Sunday recommended reducing the gap between the first two doses of Covishield vaccine to 8-16 weeks from the current 12-16 weeks after new data showed similar antibody responses in both cases.

"The latest recommendation of NTAGI is based on recent global scientific evidence derived from programmatic data," an official of the country's apex body on immunisation said. "According to it, when the second dose of Covishield is given eight weeks onwards, the antibody response generated is almost similar when administered at an interval of 12 to 16 weeks," the official added.



NATIONWIDE	MAR 19	MAR 20
Fresh cases	2,075	1,761
Recoveries	3,383	3,096
Deaths	71	127

KARNATAKA	MAR 19	MAR 20
Fresh cases	173	109
Recoveries	153	143
Deaths	2	2

A reduction of the gap between the two doses will speed up the vaccination drive, allowing the remaining six to seven crore people to get their second doses of Covishield faster at a time when Covid cases are surging in parts of Asia.

The government had extended the gap between the first two doses of Covishield vaccine from 6-8 weeks to 12-16 weeks last May on NTAGI's recommendation.

The NTAGI has not yet suggested any change in the dosage gap of Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, whose second dose is administered 28 days after the first.

EXPRESS READ

Sen's run ends in agony at All England final

Birmingham: Lakshya Sen's dream run at the All England Championships ended with a heartbreaking straight-game loss against Viktor Axelsen in the men's singles final. He lost to Axelsen 10-21 15-21 | PTI

Bommai to take part in last rites of Naveen

Davanagere: CM Basavaraj Bommai will take part in the last rites of Naveen Gyan Goudar, a medical student who was killed at Kharkiv of Ukraine on March 1. The last rites will be held at Chalageri village on Monday.

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Bus accident: Driver arrested

ENS @ Tumakuru

THE police on Sunday arrested the driver of the private bus that overturned killing six people and injuring over 40 others at Palavalli village of Pavagada taluk on Saturday morning.

The accused driver, Raghu, who was allegedly speeding and driving recklessly, had fled after the accident. Many passengers who are being treated at hospitals said Raghu did not listen to them, though they told him to slow down. He lost control of the vehicle while negotiating a turn near a tank and the bus overturned. He and the owner of the bus have been booked for the accident. P5

Horror in real life: 3 held for acid attack on drama artiste

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE police arrested three people, including a woman, for allegedly pouring a chemical containing acid on a woman drama artiste to spoil her career.

The accused have been identified as Ramesh (46), Swathi (36), and Yogesh (36). The accused had allegedly thrown the chemical on Devi (51), a resident of Ganesh Block. Ramesh, Swathi, and Devi worked at a drama company, while Yogesh is an autorickshaw driver.

The Nandini Layout police said that Devi, who was a BMTC conductor, quit her job and joined a theatre, where Ramesh and Swathi worked. It is said that Devi developed a relationship with Ramesh, who had also arranged a house on rent for her. But they parted ways after differences and fights over trivial issues. It is alleged that Ramesh's wife deserted him after Devi told her about their relationship. This had led to Ramesh nursing a grudge against Devi.

"Swathi too was not on good terms with Devi, who had snatched her roles and also allegedly tried to tarnish her image by speaking behind her back. Swathi and Ramesh found a common enemy in Devi and they decided to put an end to her career. They roped in Swathi's relative Yogesh and paid him Rs 10,000 as supari," the police said. P5

'Ghost baggage' spooks airport staff in B'luru

S LALITHA @ Bengaluru

ALARM bells went off on an Air India Express flight coming from Muscat to Mangaluru via Bengaluru on Sunday evening as the staff on board realised that two pieces of baggage had been checked in by a passenger but the person had not boarded the flight. The airport security was alerted and a thorough check of passengers and flight was conducted. The flight was not allowed to take off to Mangaluru even five hours after arrival at the Kempegowda International Airport (KIA).

Airport sources said that 189 passengers were on board the IX 818 flight, a Boeing 738 aircraft, which departed from Muscat at 10.30 am. It reached Bangaluru before its scheduled time of 3.25 pm. Of the total flyers on board, 94 were to alight in Bengaluru, while 95 others were to continue their journey to Mangaluru.

"After the flight took off from Muscat, the on board staff realised that the baggage had been checked in without the passenger. This is a massive security risk," said a top airport source.

CONTINUED ON: P5

This is a serious lapse on the part of those involved as anyone could have slipped anything in that could have risked the lives of other passengers
Source at KIA